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RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 5114
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2344
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 2459
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4499
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 4986
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 9570
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SUBJECT: MORALES RENEWS VERBAL ATTACKS ON MAINSTREAM MEDIA

¶1. (SBU) President Morales renewed his attacks on the mainstream media this week. First, he attacked leading daily newspaper La Razon March 14 for errors in its reporting on a decrease in hydrocarbons revenues and the GOB's loss of Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) funds (septel). On March 13, La Razon published a front-page article stating that hydrocarbons revenues for the month of February had plummeted from USD \$30 million to USD \$4 million. Then, on March 14, La Razon's page-one headline read "(Bolivia) Loses USD \$600 million from the Millennium Challenge Account." The evening of March 14, President Morales held a press conference in which he waved an edition of La Razon and criticized the newspaper for both stories, which he characterized as "lies and misinformation." He said his administration has "never lied, and never will lie," and then accused the paper of discriminating against him and his government. Morales sardonically stated that perhaps the Spanish-owned La Razon should be "nationalized," implying that if it were a Bolivian-owned newspaper that it would not continue with its "lies upon lies."

¶2. (SBU) A couple of days later, during a March 15 anniversary celebration of Radio San Gabriel, a pro-government station, Morales launched a verbal assault on the Unitel network. (Note: Unitel is based in the opposition stronghold department of Santa Cruz, is highly critical of President Morales and his administration, and frequently mixes editorialism into its reporting. End Note). The president alleged that Unitel never ceases its attempts to humiliate and defame his administration. Morales then suggested that Unitel should consider imitating Radio San Gabriel by acting as a voice of the people and not of the "empire."

¶3. (SBU) On March 18, Morales responded in Santa Cruz to the Interamerican Press Society's comments that there are "worrying signs" that press freedoms are deteriorating in Bolivia. Morales said accusations that he doesn't respect the press are "false" and that not only is there freedom of press in Bolivia, but also freedom to "discriminate, marginalize, humiliate and accuse falsely."

¶4. (SBU) Comment: President Morales' attacks on the press continue to build steam. Such attacks are inappropriate, and

are sometimes based on Morales' hypersensitivity over a questionable story or headline, as was the case with La Razon's MCC story. Professional journalists acknowledge that problems regarding bias, ethics and a lack of training plague the Bolivian press, but they have publicly urged the president to file complaints with the press tribunal, a self-regulatory body established by journalists, rather than publicly assailing their profession. Morales' growing frustration with the press, however, is not likely to be assuaged by a formal complaint. He has cut all GOB advertising with Unitel, and is probably further irritated by the fact that despite such cuts, Unitel remains Bolivia's most popular and lucrative TV station. End comment.
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